

Hello distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, Chairs Osten and Walker, Vice Chairs Exum and Hartley and Ranking Members Berthel and Nuccio:

My name is William White and I represent my home town of Bloomfield and First Church UCC in Simsbury where I worship.

I am a Leader in the Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance, or GHIAA. GHIAA is a network of over 50 diverse congregations across the theological spectrum working together for justice. Thank you for the opportunity to testify here today.

GHIAA is seeking funding from the state to support the work that gun violence prevention and intervention organizations are doing on the ground and on the front line in Greater Hartford and throughout CT.

The Connecticut Commission on Community Gun Violence Intervention and Prevention, launched in August of this year through the Department of Public Health, was tasked to distribute 2 million plus dollars to prevention and intervention organizations across the state. This is admirable, but it is not enough.

The Commission is made up of experts in their fields, appointed to serve by legislation passed in the 2022 legislative session. These experts include trauma surgeons, street level intervention specialists, public health professionals and those who have lost loved ones to violence. In their report, submitted to the legislature in January of this year, the Commission recommended that funding be allocated at the \$20 million dollar level over 3 years to provide continuity of resources and support.

Here is why it is personal for me.

I heard my first gunshots down the street by 9 or 10 years old in my Humbolt Park neighborhood of Chicago.

We moved to Bridgeport CT at age 12 and there too I heard gunshots not too far from the neighborhood playground where I was shooting hoops.

By age 30 I had buried one of my High School friends who was shot and killed at his Bridgeport business on a Saturday afternoon and I had buried two members of the congregation I served in New Britain. One was shot at his place of work in Hartford and the other to suicide by gun in his home. I turned 30 in 1987.

I could fill more lines of this testimony with stories from my 65 years and how I've seen guns pervade every facet of American and CT society especially in the last 35 years.

I will add one more point by saying that in the neighborhood in Hamden where now two of my grandchildren and their parents live, there have been at least two homicides and two other shootings in the past two years. One shooting near my grandkids school.

This begs the question: When will we do more to fund prevention, intervention and help mitigate the proliferation of Guns in CT and our American society?

Please support H.B. 6659

Pastor William M. White - GHIAA Leader

20 Timothy Lane Bloomfield, CT 06002 – william.white1957@gmail.com